THE AMERICAN POLICY OF INTERVENTION IN THE CARIBBEAN

BY

HARRY GEORGE MELLMAN

A. B., Washington University, 1935

A. M., Washington University, 1936

AN ABSTRACT OF A THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN POLITICAL SCIENCE IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS, 1940

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This study was begun in 1938 at the suggestion of the late Professor James W. Garner. At that time is was hoped that the dissertation might include not only a complete survey of the policy of intervention as one of the American foreign policies, but also an analysis of this policy in the light of the international law on the subject. After lengthy investigations in the field, the writer discovered that although much has been written on the American policy in the Caribbean, most of this material is sketchy and inadequate on the subject of intervention. Consequently it was decided that this dissertation should include only an intensive survey of the interventions. The writer therefore reserves for treatment in the future the analysis of the policy in the light of international law.

Sources of Information

One of the major difficulties which confronted the writer was the dearth of official published information, and the wide range of unofficial material on this subject. The various sources of information were found to duplicate one another; or, as was more common, they tended to contradict one another as to the true facts in any particular instance. Insofar as possible, use has been made of government publications, especially the volumes of *Foreign Relations,* Congressional Documents, the annual reports of the Secretary of the Navy, and the various publications of the State Department. Equally as important as a source of accurate information have been certain well-known volumes on the diplomatic relations between the United States and the various Caribbean states under consideration.

Motives for Intervention

At the Havana Conference, in 1928, Charles Evans Hughes, the head of the American delegation, defended the American policy of intervention as a means to protect American lives and property in the Caribbean.[1] This was an over-simplification of

[1] The text of Hughes' remarks may be found in *Report of the Delegates of the United States of America to the Sixth International Conference of American States* (Washington, 1928), pp. 13-15.

the entire situation; for, aside from protecting lives and property, the American Government has played the role in this area of missionary, broker, policeman, and, in general, over-lord. A survey of American activities in the Caribbean brings us to the conclusion that for three decades following the Spanish-American War, the United States was engaged in a policy of dominating the states in that area whenever the *United States* deemed such domination necessary. The term which fits this picture is "imperialism"; however, it is one of the principles of world affairs that one's own nation is never guilty of this most heinous of crimes, or, at least, that such action as is taken against smaller states is always taken for *their* good.

As Hughes stated at Havana, international law allows the landing of troops in a foreign country for the protection of nationals; however he neglected to state that this was not the only reason for action taken by the American Government in the Caribbean. Rather it must be said that it served as a loophole for a government anxious to take action against smaller states, yet unwilling to arouse sentiment either in the country or in the world by announcing brazenly the true purpose of that action. Perhaps it is desirable at this point to quote from the despatch to the State Department sent from Santo Domingo by Minister Russell in September, 1912:[2]

> " . . . Only complete control by our Government would permanently insure order and justice, but any degree of control would be beneficial; indeed, without our effective control, one administration here would be just as good as another. Once having landed men for protection of the custom houses, in accordance with out rights under the convention, we might be able to dictate a policy beneficial to the country. . . ."

Nothing is so erroneous as the assertion that in its policy of intervention, the United States was motivated only by the desire to protect its nationals abroad. Those who make such assertions fail to comprehend the whole scene; they fail to take into account the fact that in most cases the protection element in the intervention takes a secondary position.

The Beginnings of the Policy

A summary of the development of the intervention policy

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[2] *Foreign Relations* (1912), p. 366.

will serve to clarify this point. Before the Spanish-American War, the attitude of the American Government was definitely opposed to intervention in the affairs of other states.[3] In 1898, however, it found itself in the position of taking up arms to aid the Cubans in their fight for independence.[4] Having taken an active hand in Caribbean affairs, the Government was now prepared to develop a new attitude in that region. Within several years, the United States had made a ward out of Cuba by retaining for itself the right to intervene in the island "for the preservation of Cuban independence, the maintenance of a government adequate for the protection of life, property, and individual liberty, and for discharging the obligations with respect to Cuba imposed by the Treaty of Paris on the United States, now to be assumed and undertaken by the government of Cuba."[5] Furthermore, the United States had taken the Isthmus of Panama, in which the right of intervention was secured, and had placed the Dominican Republic in what might be termed "protective custody" in financial affairs. In each of these states, the American Minister held general powers of supervision over the government. A clean break with the policy of non-intervention had been made, and a new policy of intervention was fortified by the treaty right of intervention in Cuba and Panama, as well as in the Dominican Republic (in questions involving the custom houses.)

Secretary of State Elihu Root attempted to limit the sphere of action of the American Government in the Caribbean; and, for several years, although the United States held a dominant position in this area, it attempted, at least, to refrain from taking action in elections and other matters. In both Cuba and Panama, Root refused to guarantee fair elections;[6] and because the

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[3] Martin, C. E., *The Policy of the United States as Regards Intervention* (N. Y., 1921), chps. I-II; Moore, J. B., *Digest of International Law* (Washington, 1906), VI, 368-583 (Secs. 927-969).

[4] See McKinley's message to Congress of April 11, 1898. *House Document* No. 405, 55th Congress, 2nd session.

[5] For text of the Platt Amendment, see U. S. *Statutes at Large, XXXI*, 897-898; *Senate Document No.* 312, 58th Congress, 2nd session, p. 11.

[6] In regard to Cuba, see Acting Secretary of State Bacon to Consul General Steinhardt, October 10, 1906, in *Foreign Relations* (1906), pt. I, p. 474. For Panama, see Root's despatch to Secretary of War Taft, of February 21, 1906, in *ibid.*, pt. II, pp. 1203-1206.

American Government had promised to support the government against disturbances, this meant that the party in power was maintained and need fear no revolution. The intervention in Cuba in 1906 was not desired by President Theodore Roosevelt, and he held up this action until to do otherwise might mean hopeless anarchy in the island.[7] As yet there was no real attempt by the American government to question the legitimacy or honesty of the government or the nature of its acts. Before 1909 the American Government possessed the right of intervention; but in all cases it assured the states of the Caribbean that they need fear no intervention unless conditions reached the state of anarchy.

Dollar Diplomacy

The advent of Knox to the State Department meant a new policy for the United States. This is the period of "dollar diplomacy"; in this period also the State Department began to question the right of a *de facto* government to have *de jure* recognition from the United States. It was during the Taft Administration that the United States intervened actively in the affairs of the Caribbean countries. Where Roosevelt had secured the cooperation of the President of Mexico in promoting the peace of Central America, Knox preferred to take action alone to extinguish "bad" men from the area and thus to find the solution of the problem. In order to "protect American lives and property" in Nicaragua, Knox launched a campaign against "Zelayaism",[8] and proceeded to secure in that country a government more amenable to the wishes of Secretary Knox. Active military intervention in this country, followed by threats to withdraw support from the new government, gave to the United States the position of suzerain in Nicaraguan affairs. The same desire for a "good" president brought the United States actively into the scene of Dominican politics and gave to the American Government a position of dominance not only in financial matters but

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[7] Roosevelt to Taft, September 25, 1906, *House Document* No. 2, 59th Congress, 2nd session (Taft-Bacon Report), pp. 475-478.

[8] Knox's attack against "Zelayaism", and the withdrawal of recognition from the government of Zelaya is contained in a note to the Nicaraguan Chargé d'Affaires of December 1, 1909, *Foreign Relations* (1909), pp. 455-457.

also in the purely political affairs of that country.[9]

The closing year of the Taft Administration brought with it a new interpretation of the American right to intervene in Cuba. No longer would the United States wait to intervene until Cuba reached the state of anarchy; Knox would exert his influence to prevent that state from being reached. Any action of the Cuban Government which, in the opinion of Knox, might lead to difficulties, was to be prevented. The American Minister in Havana was authorized to veto any act of the government which *he* believed to be against *Cuba's* best interests.[10] True, there was no armed intervention in Cuba in this period; but there was continuous meddling by Minister Beaupré in the policies of the Cuban Government, frequently accompanied by threats to march in and replace the government with one more willing to heed advice from Washington. If this is protection of American lives and property, then it is so in an ultimate sense that is not very clear and certainly not acceptable by traditional principles of international law. By this time also Panama was heeding the advice of the American Government; and Clark's memorandum on the Treaty of 1903[11] had given to the United States far more than the Panamaians were desirous of giving.

Wilsonian Idealism and Intervention

Woodrow Wilson brought to American foreign policy in this area a new idealism which, although the President was unaware of it, fitted into the scheme of things set up by Knox. Wilson hated the use of force in international relations; but he was equally vociferous in his thunderings against those who used force in domestic affairs—even in foreign states. The fight against "Zelayaism" was continued by Wilson and extended by him to all the other states in the Caribbean. Whenever possible intervention was avoided and non-recognition utilized by Wilson to achieve his purposes; but troops were used very frequently during this period. In Mexico, Huerta was eliminated after the landing of troops at Vera Cruz, presumably to exact an apology

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[9] *Foreign Relations* (1912), pp. 366-380.

[10] Knox to Chargé Hugh S. Gibson, August 15, 1912, *ibid.*, pp. 314-315.

[11] The memorandum of J. Reuben Clark, at that time Solicitor of the State Department, may be found in *ibid.*, pp. 1221-1233.

which Huerta refused to give, and to prevent the landing of supplies going to his government.[12] Marines occupied Haiti and set up an autocratic government of their own rather than one which might have been regarded as "constitutional" in Wilson's use of that word.[13] A military government was set up in the Dominican Republic,[14] while in Panama troops were in complete control of a whole province in order to secure "justice" for Americans there.[15]

It is truly ironic that a President who had been in general opposed to the use of force in international relations should himself so frequently order the use of forcible means to secure his ends. It is also ironic that a government so distinctly opposed to "dollar diplomacy" should place itself in the position of looking after the interests of American capital in these various countries. In this connection, it must be noted that the "sugar intervention" in Cuba in 1917[16] was more far-reaching than anything which Knox might have ordered. It is equally strange that an administration which spoke so highly of "constitutional government" should so frequently find itself in the position of opposing constitutional actions where such actions interfered with the American program. When, in the Dominican Republic, the opposition forces threatened to remove Jimenez from the presidency in 1915, they were informed by Secretary Bryan that the American Government was not disposed to allow even peaceful attacks against that President, and that the American forces in the Republic would take action as might be "necessary to compel respect for his administration."[17] A few years later, in Nicara-

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[12] *Ibid.* (1914), p. 449; Metcalf, C. H., *A History of the United States Marine Corps* (N. Y., 1939), pp. 300-304.

[13] *Foreign Relations* (1914), pp. 336-382; *ibid.* (1915), 431-461. See also Douglas, P., "The American Occupation of Haiti", *Political Science Quarterly*, XLII, 228-259, 368-396.

[14] The "Proclamation of Occupation and Military Government" may be found in *Foreign Relations* (1916), pp. 246-247.

[15] Colby, E., "Panamanian-American Relations in Chiriqui", *Current History*, XII, 682-685.

[16] For details concerning the "sugar intervention", see Meyer, L. J., "The United States and the Cuban Revolution of 1917", *Hispanic American Historical Review*, X, 138-166; Fitzgibbon, R. H., *Cuba and the United States, 1905-1935* (Menasha, 1935), pp. 155-161; Metcalf, *op. cit.*, pp. 333-338.

[17] Bryan to Sullivan, April 9, 1915, *Foreign Relations* (1915), p. 283-284.

gua, the American Minister refused to allow Dr. Irias to run for the presidency because he could not conform with the qualifications set for the office by the American Government.[18] In 1917, the American Government supported President Dartiguenave, of Haiti, in his struggle against a hostile but legally-constituted National Assembly, even when the President, in violation of the Haitian Constitution, called for the election of a new and smaller legislature.[19] Furthermore, in spite of its non-recognition policy, the American Government, in 1914, recognized the government of a successful insurgent in Haiti, and announced that the government (that of Zamor) had been "duly elected by the Haitian Congress . . . (and) . . . fully established in power with the assent of the people."[20]

Perhaps much of this anomaly may be explained by President Wilson's preoccupation with the European situation; but it is very difficult, nevertheless, to interpret all of his Caribbean policy in this light. Rather we must conclude that Woodrow Wilson, the missionary in politics, lost sight of his original premises and, ill-advised on Caribbean affairs, played into the hands of those who desired American hegemony over the entire area. Perhaps it is best to interpret Wilson by the use of his own words, written long before he had the position of Chief Executive:

> "It is easy to be wise out of books, but it is infinitely difficult to be wise in the midst of affairs. The man who sits in the calmness and stillness of a study and cavils at a man who is in the midst of the infinitely various and difficult affairs of the actual arena of public matters should be very careful to revise his judgments before he condemns the man. . . How often have we seen in the biographies of men

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[18] Denny, H. N., *Dollars for Bullets* (N. Y., 1929), pp. 175-176.

[19] In December, 1917, Secretary of Navy Daniels wrote to Admiral Knapp, in command of the American forces in Haiti:

"It has long been the policy of the Government of the United States to support Dartiguenave so long as he conducted his administration in accordance with correct principles and the agreements entered into between Haiti and the United States. Any attempt to overthrow the present President of Haiti will not be countenanced, nor will any legislative action annulling any Presidential decree which was issued at a time when no legislative body was in session be favored." *Foreign Relations* (1917), pp. 802-203.

[20] Bryan to Smith, March 1, 1914, *ibid.* (1914), p. 341.

dead and gone the sufficient explanation, the honorable explanation, for things which we have condemned in them while they lived, and why is it that we, if we stand near to some men in the midst of the rush of public affairs, are lenient critics of them, and those who did not see them in their private lives are harsh critics of them? Because those who did not know them do not know their tempers and do not understand their motives."[21]

The "Big Brother" Policy

The reaction to the World War, the increasing number of complaints against the presence of American troops in the Caribbean, and the appointment of Hughes to be head of the State Department brought about a rather sudden change in the policy of the United States. Faced at the time of his advent to office with the Panama-Costa Rican war, Hughes took action to stop the war and force a settlement upon Panama.[22] But the whole tenor of the Hughes Administration was one of non-intervention. Hughes did whatever was possible to get American troops out of these countries. The Secretary of State desired but one thing—to have "prosperous, peaceful, and law-abiding neighbors with whom we can cooperate to mutual advantage."[23] Although it was during this period that Crowder dominated the Cuban scene, far more prominent are the American activities in the other states. Plans were made to withdraw troops from the Dominican Republic, and improved conditions were forthcoming in Haiti. The State Department refused to supervise elections in Nicaragua; while in Panama, in spite of that nation's bitterness at the result of the Costa Rican border dispute, steps were taken to bring about more friendly relations between the two countries.

However, when Hughes was replaced, the American policy began to return to the old position. It is clear that Kellogg was unable to regard the small countries of the Caribbean as in any

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[21] "Spurious Versus Real Patriotism in Education", October 13, 1899, *School Review*, VII, 618. Quoted by Notter, H., *The Origins of the Foreign Policy of Woodrow Wilson* (Baltimore, 1937), p. 219.

[22] For an excellent discussion of the border dispute between Panama and Costa Rica, see McCain, W. D., *The United States and the Republic of Panama* (*Durham*, 1937), pp. 119-143, 206-224.

[23] See address of Hughes before the annual meeting of the American Bar Association, August 30, 1923, quoted in his *The Pathway of Peace* (N. Y., 1925), pp. 113, ff.

way outside the American sphere of action. The Secretary of State hated and feared Bolshevism, and thought that he saw it becoming prominent all over Mexico and Central America.[24] "Property" became again the "key" word of the American policy; and when Mexico showed too little regard for the rights of property, Kellogg announced that his patience was exhausted with that country and that it might be necessary for the American Government to take measures, forcible ones if necessary, in order to protect American property as well as lives. In Nicaragua, the protection of property absorbed the interest of the State Department, and soon after their evacuation, under the Hughes policy, in 1925, the marines were returned, and proceeded to take effective measures to prevent injury to Americans in the Nicaraguan Civil War. Already, however, the Latin American states were prepared to take up the cudgels against this American policy and those which had preceeded it; and at the Havana Conference of 1928 it was apparent that the United States must either give up its policy of meddling in Caribbean affairs on a unilateral basis or be faced with the possibility of being without friends anywhere in the western hemisphere.[25]

The "Good Neighbor" Policy

Although Hughes had been responsible for the turn away from the policy of intervention as pursued by the previous administrations, it is during the Hoover Administration that we have the first signs of what is later to be called the policy of the "good neighbor". After a pre-inauguration tour of Central and South America, Hoover proceeded to announce the various aspects of the new policy. Within a month he had announced that during his administration, at least, the United States would not use force to secure or maintain contracts between American citizens and

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[24] On January 12, 1927, Secretary of State Kellogg left with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, before which he had testified, a memorandum entitled "Bolshevik Aims and Policies in Mexico and Latin America". This memorandum brought from the *Baltimore Sun* a doubt whether "ever before in the history of this Nation has the head of the State Department appeared in public in a state of such utterly indecent intellectual exposure." *Congressional Record*, 69th Congress, 2nd session, Vol. LXVIII, pt. 2, pp. 1645-1653.

[25] *Report of the Delegates of the United States of America to the Sixth International Conference of American States* (Washington, 1928).

foreign governments.[26] After a study of conditions in Haiti, which he had requested, Hoover announced that plans were being made for the evacuation of the marines from that country.[27] Withdrawal was begun of the forces in Nicaragua, a withdrawal which continued in spite of the increasing activity of Sandino's bandits''. Then, in April, 1931, Secretary of State Stimson, who had become acquainted with the situation in Nicaragua in 1927,[28] announced a clean break with the past when he informed Americans in that country that they should no longer expect protection from the American Government as long as they remained in the interior of the country. If they were disturbed by the marauders, they were to look for protection either to the Nicaraguan National Guard or to the American vessels in Nicaraguan ports for that purpose.[29] The non-recognition policy of Knox and Wilson had already been given up with the recognition, in 1930, in various Latin American countries of new governments which had gained power through the use of force and revolution.[30]

It remained for Franklin D. Roosevelt to complete the task of ending the policy of intervention. Although the position of Sumner Welles in the Cuban crisis of 1933 is not as yet clear, it is obvious that intervention, as a policy, was definitely a thing of the past. The only troops still left in the Caribbean, those in Haiti, were withdrawn, the right of intervention in Cuban affairs under the Platt Amendment given up and, in general, this right was given up in every country. When, at Montevideo, in 1933, Secretary Hull announced the acceptance by the United States

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[26] The announcement of this change of policy was made before the Gridiron Club of Washington, D. C. The text of this address is to be found in Myers, W. S. (ed.), *The State Papers and other Public Writings of Herbert Hoover* (2 vols., Garden City, 1934), I, 27-31.

[27] *Ibid.*, II, 78-82. See also *Report of the President's Commission for the Study and Review of Conditions in the Republic of Haiti* (Washington, 1930).

[28] In March, 1927, Stimson had been sent to Nicaragua as the personal representative of Coolidge to find some means of settling the internal problems of that country. See Stimson's *American Policy in Nicaragua* (N. Y., 1927), *in passim.*

[29] U. S., Department of State, *Press Releases, April* 18, 1931, p. 284.

[30] In 1930, new governments of this type were recognized by the American Government in Guatemala, Peru, Bolivia, Brazil, and Argentina.

of the non-intervention clause of a protocol subject to the non-intervention statements of himself, the President, and of "the law of nations as generally recognized",[31] some of the Latin American statesmen believed that the United States was trying to "hedge" the subject. A few days later, however, President Roosevelt himself erased these doubts in an address at the Woodrow Wilson Foundation, when he announced that "the maintenance of constitutional government in other nations is not a sacred obligation devolving upon the United States." And, completing a trend of thought begun many years before, he announced that henceforth the American policy would be one of cooperation with the other states in the western hemisphere for their mutual benefit.[32]

The refusal to protect property in Cuba, even before the abrogation of the Platt Amendment, demonstrated clearly to the world that, at least during the Roosevelt Administration, there would be no intervention in the affairs of the Caribbean states. For those who still doubted the sincerity of the American President's declaration, the United States, at the Conference of 1936 at Buenos Aires, became a signatory of a convention in which it renounced the right to use force, under international law, under any circumstances, and specifically agreed to the provision that "intervention by one State in the internal or external affairs of another State is condemned."[33] The break with the past was now complete, and until the present time there has been no suggestion that the American Government would break its promise to the states of Latin America.

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[31] The text of Hull's remarks at Montevideo may be found in *Report of the Delegates of the United States of America to the 7th International Conference of American States* (Washington, 1933), pp. 18-19.

[32] This address may be found in U. S., Department of State, *Press Releases,* December 30, 1933, pp. 380-383.

[33] The text of this convention may be found in U. S., Department of State, *Treaty Series,* No. 923.

Vita

Harry George Mellman was born in St. Louis, Missouri, on February 22, 1916. He was educated in the public schools of that city, graduating from Soldan High School in January, 1931. He attended Washington University from 1931 to 1937, receiving the A.B. degree with Final Honors in 1935, and the A.M. degree in Political Science and History in 1936. In 1937, he transferred to the University of Illinois, where he has continued his graduate work, and has been an Assistant in the Department of Political Science since 1938.